



Local Authority Roundtable

Expert Q&A – How Can The Public Sector Accelerate The Adoption Of Digital Services?

The NHS and local authorities alike have quickly rolled out a range of digital tools to help people remotely access vital services when they have been unable to do so in person.

This has significantly accelerated the pace of digital transformation across the public sector, but how have the experiences of lockdown changed the way digital services are designed and delivered, and where are we heading next?

To find out, we brought together a panel of experts from politics, local authorities and private sector technology specialists, and put a series of key questions to them to understand what the future holds for digital services in the public sector:

Have we reached a tipping point in digital healthcare and telephone access to GPs?

Dr Dan Poulter MP – The pandemic has focused minds on how we use technology to deliver healthcare, helping to manage people with chronic conditions and issuing repeat prescriptions, for instance. But it's not just about the NHS communicating with people in a more efficient way remotely, it's also about how we can use other

technology such as smart devices to contribute to give more support to people who are unwell. Similarly, sharing information and the interoperability of systems remains a challenge, but overall there has been a big leap forward for people with long term conditions.

“ The pandemic has focused minds on how we use technology to deliver healthcare ”

Will the role of personal smart technologies now come into its own in the healthcare environment, for example?

Martyn Evans, Head of Product at Unboxed, a service design and digital product development agency. There is a question mark over whether some of the services we have seen switch to online in the past year have been – as yet – truly transformational. In fact, a lot of fundamental technology redesign that's needed to really take advantage of digital technology has slowed down due to COVID-19.

One of the challenges with introducing innovations such as wearable technologies into the healthcare and treatment process, for instance, is the lack of interoperability and platforms to capture the data. So, before we can start to broaden the use of technology, we need to adopt better digital communication processes between patients and healthcare professionals.

Will the role of personal smart technologies now come into its own in the healthcare environment, for example?

Jed Plant, Account Director at Six Degrees Group, a cloud managed service provider.

While digitisation is a major discussion point at the moment, we are seeing some real challenges around legacy technology. The NHS is working with some very old systems that need moving to cloud infrastructure and services, and because it is also a very complex organisation, there will also need to be some cultural changes within the sector against the backdrop of limited resources.

There are certain areas that are moving forward with cloud-enabled interoperability, but steps along this road are gradual. While remote working has been delivered

successfully, it has uncovered a number of areas of concern, particularly around security, data protection and privacy.



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What have been the experiences of County Councils in reaching the tipping point for digital service provision?

Jessica Davies, Digital Care Advisor at Suffolk County Council. Suffolk is in the process of setting up a digital care ecosystem which will help people use various devices at home. Although the delivery of this has been delayed by COVID-19, the council has moved forward with the provision of video care phones to reduce the strain on care services helping vulnerable people who also needed to remain isolated during the worst of the pandemic. This enabled care services to replace some visits while also helping people to stay connected with friends and family.

Gareth Morris, Senior Technical Lead at Suffolk County Council. Local councils aren't as bogged down with legacy technology compared to the NHS and they also have a smaller technology footprint, which enables digital services to be rolled out more quickly. For instance, there has been a drive among local authorities to introduce minimum viable services using in-house capabilities in days rather than procurement processes that can take months. There has also been more collaboration between ICT and the wider organisation, and as a result, the Council is more agile than it was pre-COVID.

What is the role of automation, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in accelerating digital service provision in the NHS and local authorities?

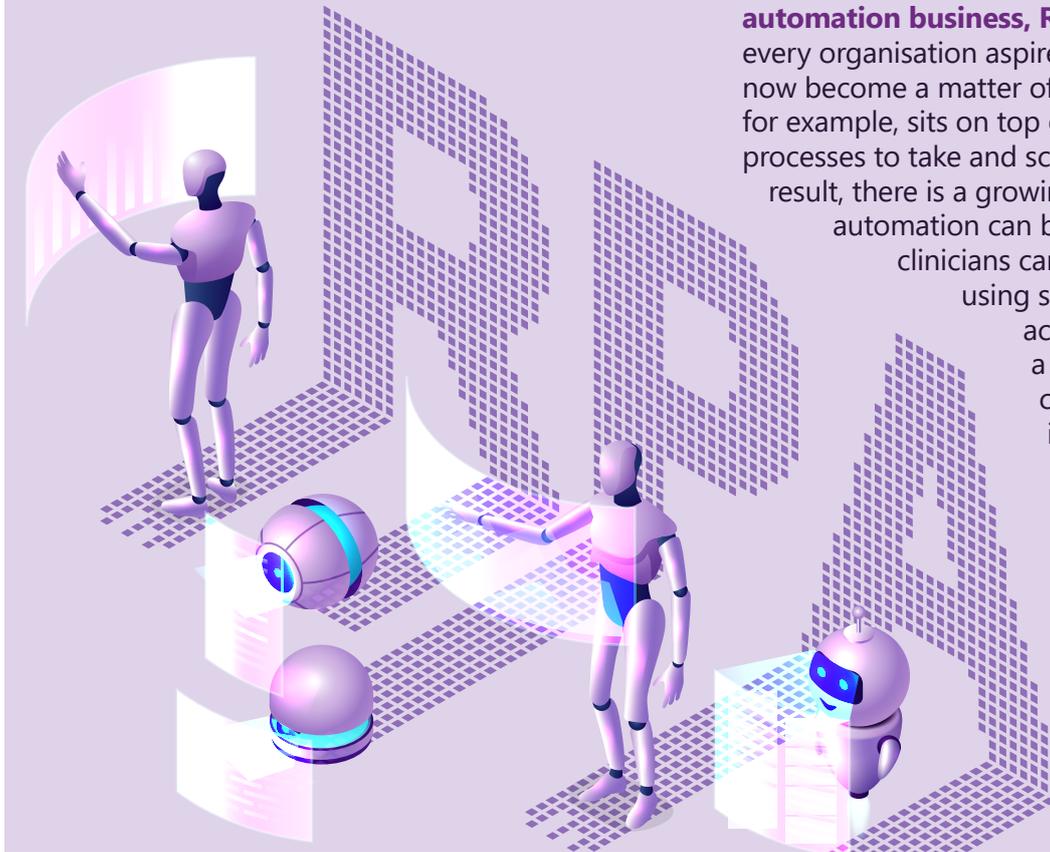
Keith McDowell, Robotic Process Automation 'RPA' Manager at Norfolk County Council –

The importance of Robotic Process Automation is growing, and established RPA providers can already leverage legacy and cloud-based systems to help

speed up workflow and increase efficiency, for example. Local authorities don't need to make a lot of changes to develop their use of RPA and don't need a lot of new technology to be in place.

James Duez, Co-Founder and CEO of intelligent automation business, Rainbird –

While just about every organisation aspires to be more digital, it has now become a matter of survival. Machine learning, for example, sits on top of RPA to fundamentally fix processes to take and scale human expertise. As a result, there is a growing recognition that intelligent automation can be applied to create tools that clinicians can use to help themselves, and using software to scale expertise across the healthcare sector is a very interesting area, and will continue to grow in importance.



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How do public service organisations address the development challenges that come with the rollout of more digital services?

Chris Pont, CEO at IJYI - The sense of urgency behind technology transformation in general has also helped focus minds on what represents a Minimal Viable Product 'MVP' for each specific situation and the needs of organisations such as local authorities. Rather than fleshing out huge projects that can run into years, for example, agile software development can quickly get products into the hands of users, and we've seen this happen more frequently - through necessity – in the last 12 months than ever before.

But, bridging the gap between the people who develop the technology and those that have the role-based expertise is critical – putting that process in the middle can help ensure delivering MVP can help provide useful digital public services.

Martyn Evans, Head of Product at Unboxed – MVP is very important because it allows organisations to work with teams directly and create something that meets their needs. This makes an incredibly valuable contribution to innovation across the public sector space, whereas the traditional, less effective alternative is to buy software products off the shelf, forcing people to bend their approach to match the way it has been designed.

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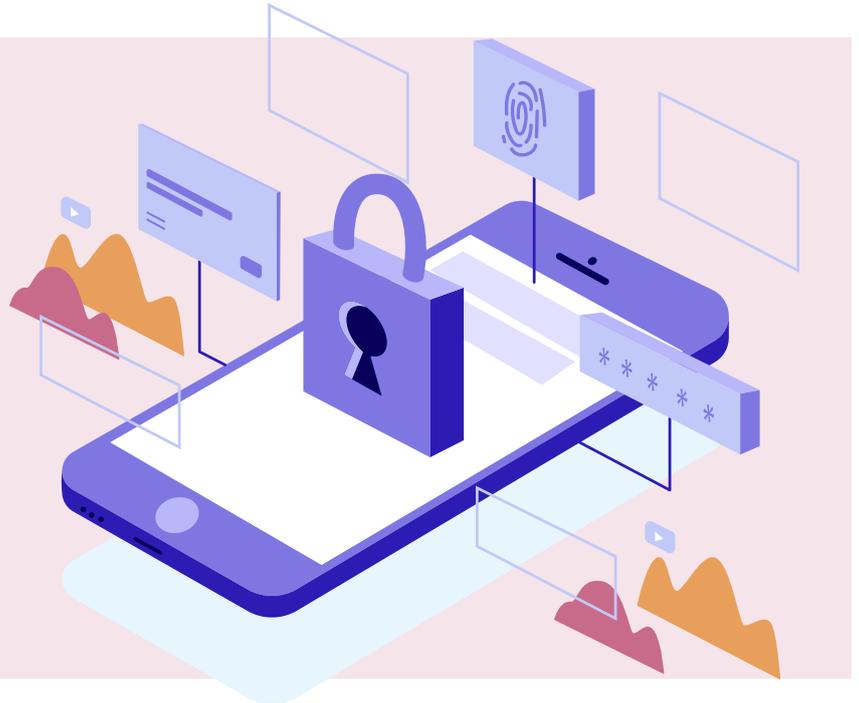
How important is it that organisations deliver services in a multi-channel format to meet the needs of people across society?

James Duez, Co-Founder and CEO of intelligent automation business, Rainbird – People should be offered a seamless experience with the ability to use whichever device they prefer, but this will require organisations to invest in platforms that enable them to build solutions and have them talk to each other.

But, there remains an education job to do so people understand the importance of an MVP philosophy in building small, incremental projects.

What about data protection - how can digital services be developed more quickly while keeping personal data safe?

Gareth Morris, Senior Technical Lead at Suffolk County Council – Those involved in the development of digital services should view it as their sacred duty to protect public data, and that it is used in an ethical way. This builds trust and having strong controls in place is vital for local authorities to demonstrate they take these responsibilities seriously. Members of the public should also understand how their data is being used along with the right to remove consent at any stage.



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And finally, what does the new normal look like for tech services in local authorities?

Jessica Davies, Digital Care Advisor at Suffolk County Council – Our vision is to have digital care, for example, as part of business as usual – not just at the edges. We also want to see workers confident in their use of new digital services and feel they can use it to help as many people as possible.

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To learn more about how IJYI helps local authorities design and deliver effective digital services, [click here](#).

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Email marketing@ijyi.com, or

Call +44 (0)1473 558 748

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